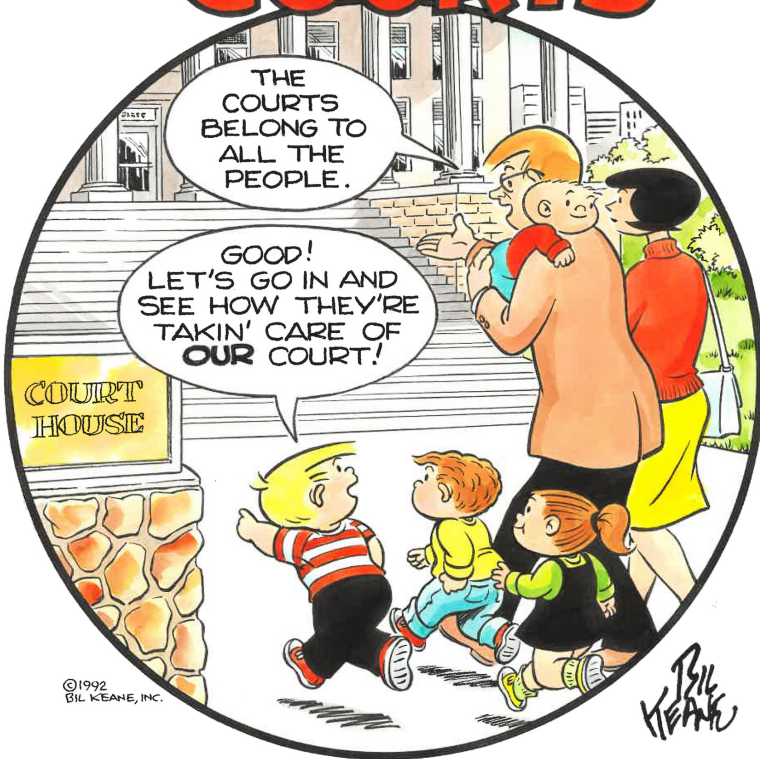


The **FAMILY
CIRCUS®**

VISITS THE COURTS



**A quick guide to help you learn
about Arizona's Courts**

Welcome to Arizona Courts

This booklet gives you a closer look at the courts and various people, including judges, attorneys, and court staff, who are involved in Arizona's judicial system. Learning about this system is an important part of being a responsible citizen. We hope you will continue to explore the judicial branch of government and how the legal system works for you.

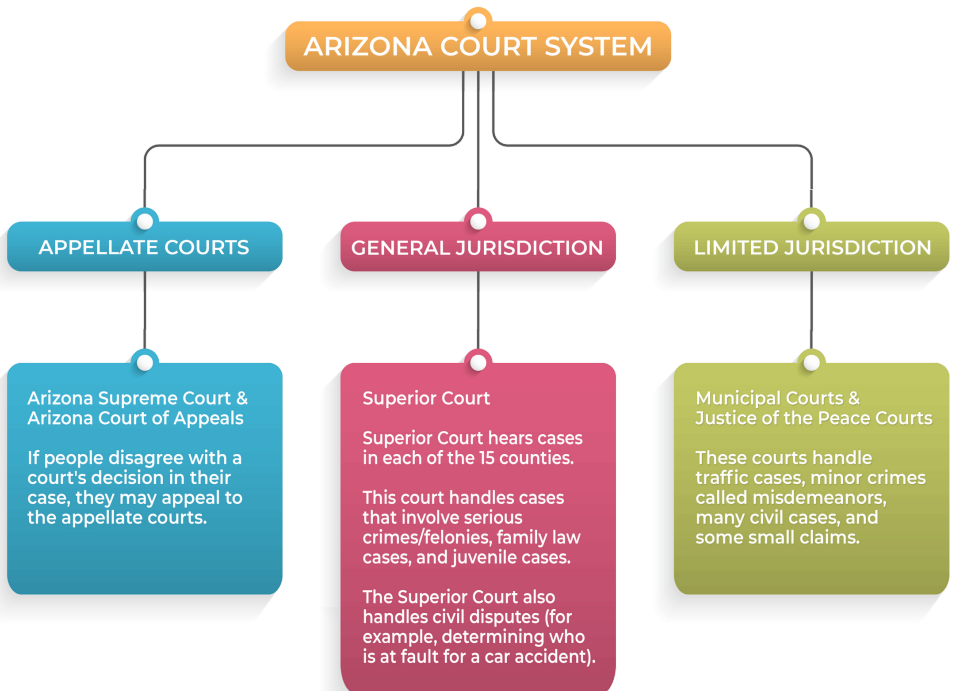
Visiting a courtroom is a good way to begin. Courts are places where people can resolve disagreements, and the Arizona Constitution guarantees a fair process to anyone who appears in a court. But there are many other ways you might become familiar with the judicial system, including as a litigant, witness, juror, volunteer, or an interested observer.

Remember, Arizona's courts belong to all of us.

Arizona's Court System

You might be familiar with court system as the Arizona Supreme Court, Arizona Court of Appeals, Superior Courts, Municipal Courts, and Justice of the Peace Courts.

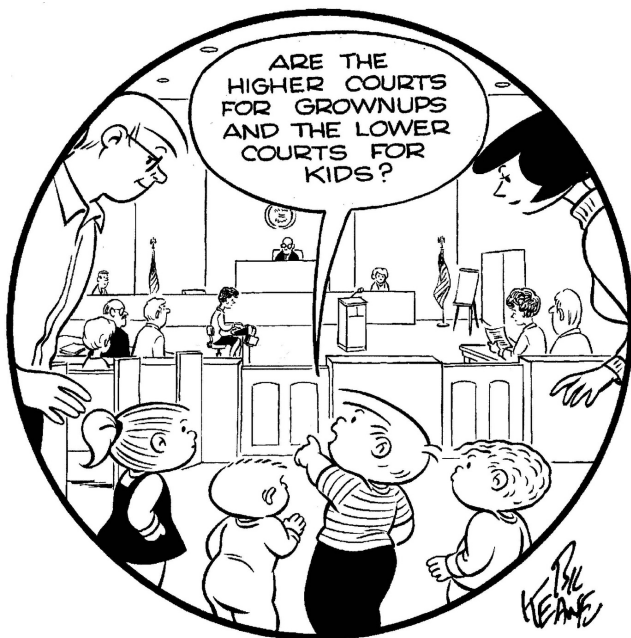
And the court system in Arizona has three levels:



The Courtroom

A trial takes place in the courtroom of a limited jurisdiction or general jurisdiction court. The trial is a process of gathering the facts in a civil or criminal case, and then applying the law to the facts. A judge oversees the trial and helps make sure it is a fair process. Many trials also have a jury, which is a group of people from the community who find the facts and decide who should win based on the law.

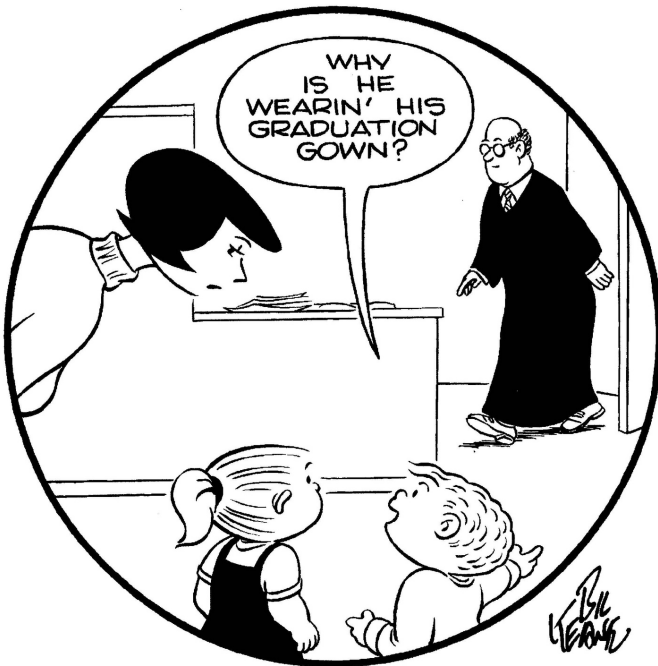
In a criminal case, the jury decides if the person accused of breaking the law, called the defendant, is guilty or not guilty. In a civil (non-criminal) case, people with a dispute they cannot resolve themselves come to the court to have a judge or jury decide.



The Judge

A judge supervises the courtroom and oversees court proceedings. A judge wears a black robe and sits at a raised desk called the bench. When the judge is in the courtroom, court is in session.

Judges make sure a trial is fair and make decisions based on the Arizona Constitution and Arizona law. Sometimes a judge will use a jury, but not all trials have one. A trial without a jury is called a "bench trial," where the judge alone decides the outcome of the case.



The Jury

A jury is a group of citizens, 18 years or older, who help the court make decisions called verdicts in a trial. Juries can have from 6 to 12 members who sit in the jury box and listen carefully to all of the witnesses and other evidence (facts) presented. Serving on a jury is an important part of being a good citizen.

Jury verdicts are based on the evidence jurors hear during a trial and on the law the judge tells them about. In a civil trial, jurors must decide important questions like who owns a piece of land or whether a person who was hurt should receive money for their injuries. In a criminal trial, jurors decide whether or not the defendant is guilty or not guilty of breaking the law.



The Attorneys

Attorneys are also called lawyers. They went to school to learn about the law and court rules, and they represent their clients in court. That means they help their clients prove their case at trial, often by finding witnesses and other evidence to support their client's case. In criminal cases, the Attorney General or County Attorney represents the State of Arizona. Other attorneys, called "defense counsel," represent the person accused of breaking the law.



The Court Clerk

The first step in starting a case is to file a complaint with the clerk of court. The clerk keeps legal records and evidence for the court. Anyone can go to the clerk's office and read information about a court case, even if the case is many years old.

In the courtroom, the clerk asks witnesses to "swear" or promise to tell the truth. This helps encourage the witnesses to be honest when they answer questions in court, which is called witness testimony.



The Court Reporter

The court reporter, using a special machine, makes a complete record of every word the witnesses, attorneys, and judge say in Superior Court. Some courts now use electronic recording instead of court reporters. Justice and municipal courts do not always make a record of everything that is said.

When people believe a mistake was made in their case, they can ask a higher court, called an appellate court, to review their case. This process is called an appeal. The court reporter's notes are very important when a case is appealed because the attorneys and judges can read exactly what was said during the trial.



The Witness Stand

People who know something about a case are asked to be witnesses at the trial. Witnesses sit in a special chair at the front of the courtroom near the judge.

Witnesses must take an oath to tell the truth. They answer questions from attorneys and sometimes from the judge or jury. Witnesses are very important because they can tell the court what they heard or saw. This helps the judge or jury make a fair decision based on what actually happened.



The Spectators

Visitors are welcome to most courtrooms to watch a trial. They are asked to stand when the judge enters and leaves the courtroom. It is important for visitors to be quiet in the courtroom, so everyone can hear the judge, attorneys, and witnesses speak. If visitors are too noisy, the judge may order them to be quiet or leave the courtroom.

As part of its commitment to making courts accessible to the public, the Arizona Supreme Court livestreams its hearings and other court proceedings on the Internet and many Arizona courts are holding virtual court hearings. See your local court website for more information.



Special Thanks

Arizona's judicial system offers
its appreciation and thanks to Bil Keane and
The Family Circus:
Billy, Dolly, Jeffy, and PJ
for this special gift to Arizona.



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